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BLM–ALASKA
FRONTIERS

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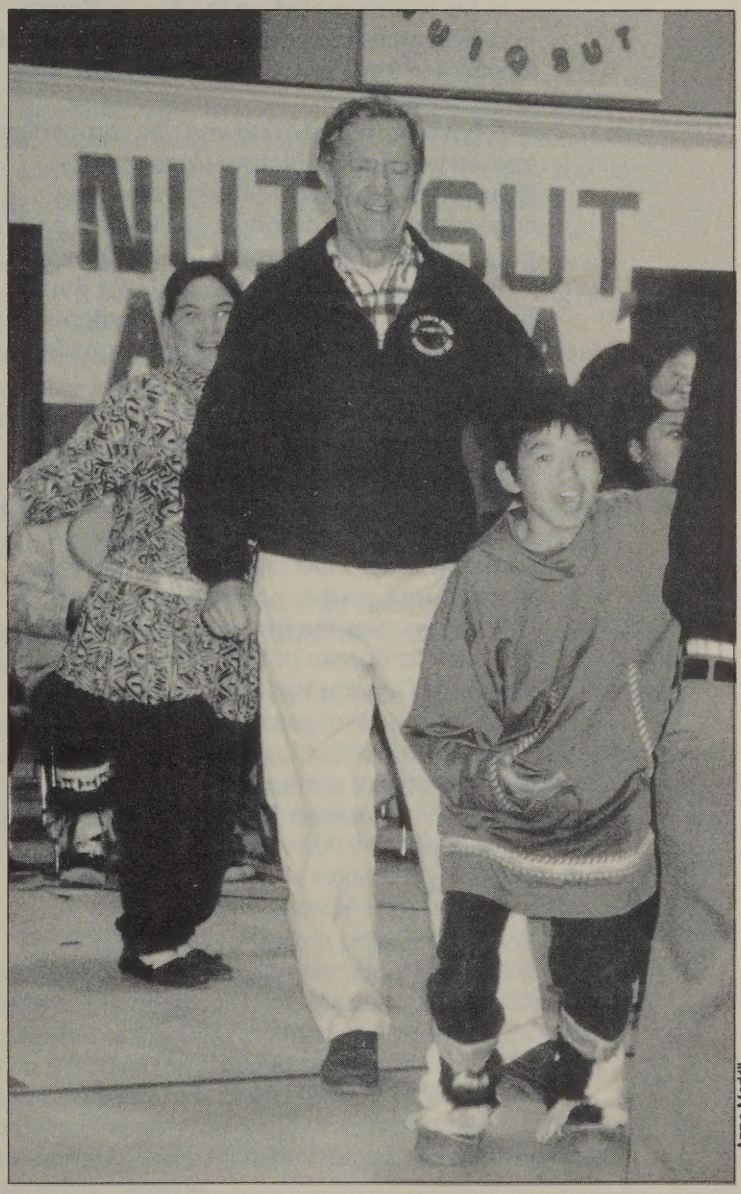
Listening to the voices of tradition

For six days in July, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt visited the northeastern corner of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A). The Bureau of Land Management, working with the North Slope Borough, the State of Alaska, and the U.S. Minerals Management Service and other federal agencies, is developing an Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the 4.6 million-acre area of the reserve.

After a town meeting in the village of Nuiqsut the residents entertained the Secretary with traditional Inupiat dancing. Babbitt, along with Alaska State Governor Tony Knowles, joined others in the invitational dance held at the Nuiqsut Trapper School.

Specialized workshops and public scoping meetings conducted this spring gathered public input regarding development of NPR-A. BLM's draft IAP/EIS will combine extensive research of existing literature and studies of North Slope resources, along with results from the workshops and scoping meetings. The draft report is due in November of 1997, the final EIS plan in June 1998. Information gathered for that plan will help Babbitt make his decision about whether to open the area of the NPR-A to oil and gas leasing.



Anne Morkill

Senate confirms Pat Shea as new BLM Director

The U.S. Senate approved Patrick A. Shea of Utah as the new director of the Bureau of Land Management on July 31.

Shea, 49, is a prominent Utah lawyer, educator, and businessman. Along with practicing law in Salt Lake City and the District of Columbia, Shea is an adjunct professor of political science at the Brigham Young University Law School.

In his testimony before the Senate Energy and Resources Committee, Shea described his 22 years of legal practice and relevant experience.

"I have represented oil and gas companies, and served on The Nature Conservancy Board for Utah. I've represented mining companies while starting a 15,000-acre nature park in City Creek Canyon in Salt Lake City."

Shea mentioned his three goals for the BLM. "We'll focus on being good neighbors, practicing good science, and being productive partners."

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt welcomed Shea's experience in dispute resolution strategies. "Pat will bring all those with an interest in the public lands to the table so that we continue to develop and implement common-sense land management policies that ensure a proper public land heritage."

Shea becomes the fifteenth director of the 51-year-old Bureau of Land Management. The BLM Director has policy and administrative responsibility for 270 million acres of surface land, and more than 570 million acres of mineral estate, an annual budget of more than $1 billion, and a work force of about 9,000 employees. BLM currently manages about 88 million acres of public land in Alaska.

BLM/State agreement helps small mining operations

Bureau of Land Management Alaska State Director Tom Allen announced an agreement between the State and the BLM that will help small mining operators to comply with the BLM's new reclamation bonding requirements. The agreement gives some small Alaska mining operations on BLM-managed public lands continued access to the state reclamation bonding pool.

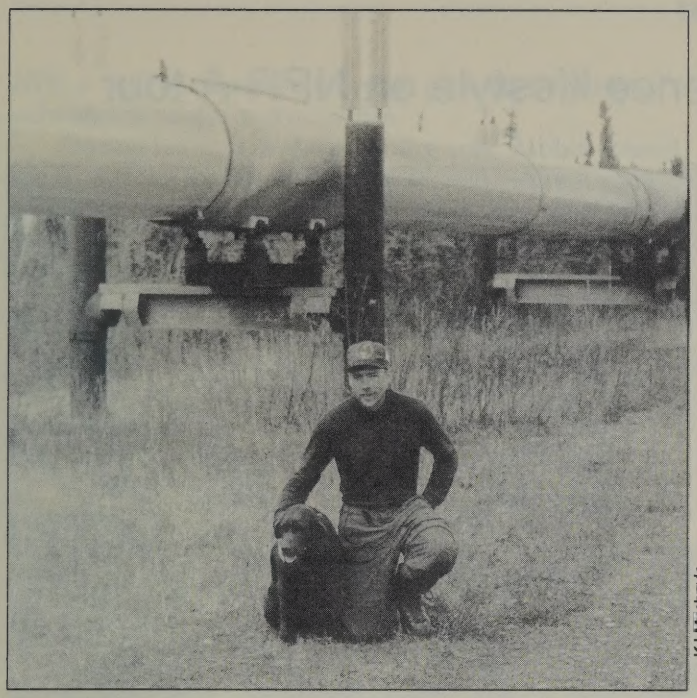
For the past several years, there have been mining operations at about 400 different locations in Alaska; about half of these involve at least some federal mining claims. In 1990 the Alaska Legislature established a statewide requirement that reclamation be done concurrently with the mining operation and that there be an approved reclamation plan in place at the start of the mine.

The new BLM regulations require that all mining and exploration operators, regardless of the amount of acreage affected, maintain bonds or financial guarantees that cover the entire amount of projected reclamation costs. The regulations further require that bonds submitted to the BLM be accompanied by a professional engineer's certification of reclamation costs.

However, under the provisions of the agreement signed by Allen and Alaska State Department of Natural Resources Commissioner John Shively, miners with federal claims will be able to meet the requirements of the BLM regulations by participating in the state bonding pool. The bonding pool provides insurance coverage for mine operators to ensure the completion of any reclamation required under federal surface management regulations. By using the bonding pool, the miners will not have to provide a separate certification from a professional engineer.

Steve Borell, director of the Alaska Miners Association, is pleased with the agreement. "Although Alaska miners on state, private and Alaska Native mineral properties are unaffected by the new federal bonding requirements, a number of miners with small claims on federal land would have been at a significant economic disadvantage," says Borell.

Trans-Alaska Trekking



KJ Mushovic

Ned Rozell and his Labrador retriever, Jane, take a break during their 800-mile journey along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

Ned Rozell, 34, and his Labrador retriever, Jane, are in the midst of an 800-mile journey along the Trans-Alaska Pipeline (TAPS). They set out from the pipeline terminus in Valdez on May 4. By September 6, Rozell hopes to have permission from the British Petroleum Company and ARCO Alaska, Inc. to walk through the Prudhoe Bay Operating Area and wade in the Arctic Ocean.

Rozell coordinated trip planning with numerous land owners and management agencies along the corridor, including the BLM and the Joint Pipeline Office. While passing through the heart of the Glennallen District, Rozell and Jane took a break in order to talk about their trip.

Soft-spoken, with an unassuming manner and a ready smile, Rozell usually is a science writer at the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geophysical Institute. Why is he hiking across three mountain ranges and hundreds of rivers? "I just wanted to walk across Alaska ever since I came here ten years ago. This was just a good year to do it."

Originally from upstate New York, near Albany, Rozell served as a park ranger in the Yukon Charley National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, but he admits, "This is different than anything I've ever done. Before this, the longest I've ever backpacked was one week."

Rozell's trip coincides with the 20th anniversary of the completion of the TAPS, as well as the 80th anniversary of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, and the 50th anniversary of the University's Geophysical Institute.

Rozell says, "Atigun Pass (elevation 4,739 feet) and the rest of the Brooks Range might be the most challenging portion of the trip." Another source of apprehension is "how hiking will be affected once mosquitoes begin to swarm." Rozell's initial worries about how 10-year-old Jane might fare have been put at ease, as she is doing well and seems to enjoy trekking, especially chasing after the snowshoe hares.

Rozell notes that, while he basically sticks to the gravel road adjacent to the pipeline as much as possible, "I'm becoming less of a purist (about staying on the pipeline) as I go along, and putting safety first. I had heard about people crossing the Tazlina River by walking across the pipe, but I took a detour of a few miles."

Rozell says that, "In some ways, it has been easier than I thought it would be." Each day, however, poses new challenges. "It took me a day to do two miles going up Thompson Pass," (just north of Valdez, elevation 2,812 feet).

Hot showers are few and far between. Rozell laughs, "I had a bath in Squirrel Creek — but it was a quick, COLD one."

Rozell continues to write science columns for Alaska Newspaper regional publications, filing them weekly as he rendezvous with supporters to resupply food and other necessities. He also hopes to write about his experiences. By September, he should have a book full of them!

—KJ Mushovic

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor transects both BLM-Alaska's Glennallen and Northern Districts. Portions of the pipeline corridor are under the direct management of the BLM's Office of Pipeline Monitoring. The Office of Pipeline Monitoring is the lead federal compoonent of the Joint Pipeline Office, which, in conjunction with the State of Alaska, oversees and monitors Alyeska Pipeline Company's operations of the entire pipeline.

Secretary Babbitt spotlights subsistence lifestyle on NPR-A tour

Science, subsistence and petroleum technology converge on NPR-A

Ann Morkill

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, Alaska State Governor Knowles, and staff enjoy hot coffee and dried whitefish outside of host Noah Itta's cabin.

In mid-July, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt made a whirlwind, six-day visit to Alaska. His primary focus was the 4.6 million-acre Northeastern Planning Area of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). His intent was to talk with scientists who study the area's resources, the rural residents who use the area, and the oil companies who want to develop the area.

State and federal biologists with years of experience on the North Slope briefed Babbitt about important issues and concerns surrounding polar bears, Spectacled eiders, peregrine falcons, musk oxen, caribou and the ecology of the Colville River drainage.

The Alaska Oil and Gas Association told Babbitt about advances in technology that allow oil field development with less impact than in the past.

And village residents made sure that Babbitt understood that subsistence — traditional hunting, fishing and gathering — is a big issue.

It was a lot of information for the man who leads six federal agencies to absorb, to synthesize and to think about.

"I think advances in the oil industry — fewer roads, smaller structures and better information about wildlife — will make development compatible with subsistence," Babbitt said. He added that if the study doesn't back that up, he will not allow leasing.

In the village of Nuiqsut, the Secretary visited with 150 people in the school gymnasium. Several spoke against oil and gas development, fearing its negative impacts on subsistence. Others acknowledged benefits received from earlier oil development, but urged the Secretary to not overlook their concerns.

The trip highlight was a visit to Noah Itta's traditional fish camp on the Miguakiak River, west of Teshekpuk Lake. The Secretary pulled a whitefish from a gillnet strung across the stream, learned to fillet with an ulu, and tasted a morsel of fresh fish grilled by Itta's daughter, Dora. He investigated a natural freezer carved out of the permafrost. As he walked the desolate beauty of the treeless arctic tundra, he talked with Itta about caribou migration, oil drilling and changing seasons.

Babbitt insists that any oil development in the

NPR-A will be done in a way that protects traditional subsistence access and activities.

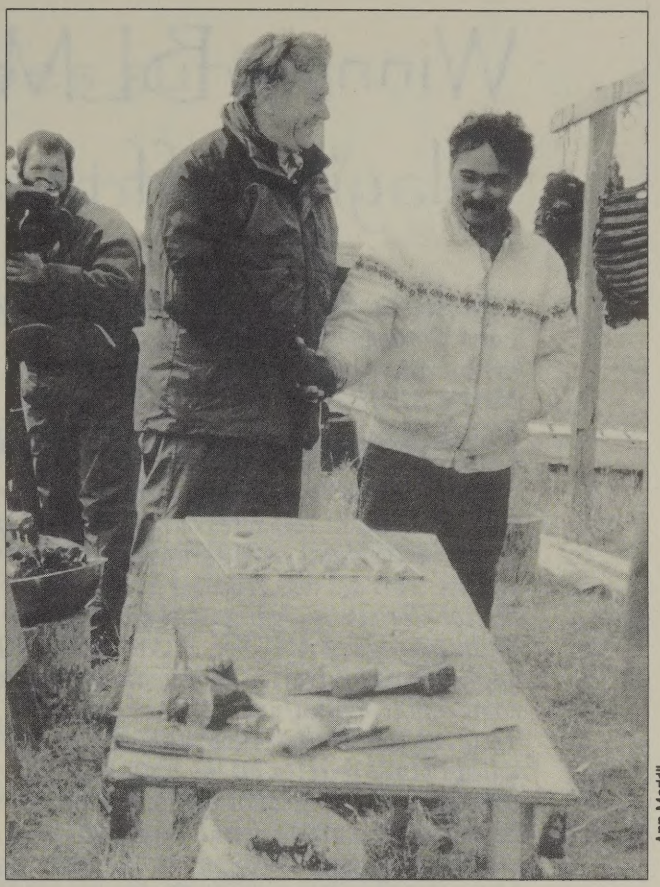
During his tour of the planning area, Babbitt toured the Kuparuk Operations Center, as well as the Alpine oil field, with ARCO officials. Another stop was Umiat, a staging area for early oil exploration activities on the Colville River.

He flew by helicopter over a dinosaur fossil site, millions of waterfowl and shorebirds on the Colville Delta, goose molting areas, Spectacled eider habitat, and the calving area for the Teshekpuk caribou herd. He walked on the Pik sand dunes, and visited abandoned well sites from exploration in the 1960s.

In Barrow, Babbitt heard from community representatives and subsistence specialists about the pros and cons of onshore oil exploration and development. He answered questions from North Slope residents during a call-in talk show on public radio, and was honored by local dignitaries during a reception at a private home.

The third day of the tour took Babbitt to Atqasuk, a small village southwest of Barrow, where a large portion of the population turned out to greet him and express their concerns.

Floating past tall cliffs of silt and rocks during an afternoon raft trip down the Colville River gave Babbitt a different view of the importance of the arctic environment. Using a spotting scope, the Secretary was able to watch gyrfalcons, rough-legged hawks and arctic peregrine falcons that come from as far away as Mexico to breed and lay their eggs in roughly-built nests along the remote bluffs.



Ann Morkill

Secretary Babbitt visits with the Itta family at their subsistence camp on the Miguakiak River near Teshekpuk Lake.

Ann Morkill

Dora Itta prepares caribou ribs and whitefish strips for drying at her family's subsistence camp.

On the last evening of the trip the weary party arrived at the Mesa Site, an archaeological dig on top of a 200-foot mesa north of the Brooks Range. This 12,000-year-old Paleoindian hunting lookout gave Babbitt the chance to scrape a few flakes from the soil, and visualize the land and wildlife from the perspective of people from long ago. A contemplative Babbitt reiterated his dedication to producing a thorough environmental impact statement. "There's too much at stake here," Babbitt said. "The subsistence link — once it is broken, it will never be restored."

The planning process has been controversial. Many in the environmental community have complained that the BLM is pushing ahead too quickly and sacrificing careful research to prepare the Environmental Impact Statement, scheduled to be completed in June of 1998. The oil industry says the plan should take less than 18 months. Recognizing the pressure from all sides, Babbitt vowed that if concerns are not adequately addressed, he will call for more studies before making his decision.

—Sharon Durgan Wilson

Winning BLM team had everyone "playing off the same sheet of music"

In Alaska, the Bureau of Land Management's Land Transfer Program utilizes three extraordinary and interwoven statutes: the Native Allotment Act of 1906, the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958, and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA).

The 1906 Native Allotment Act authorized the transfer of up to 160 acres of non-mineral land to individual Indians, Aleuts and Eskimos of Alaska. This act was repealed by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. Just prior to the passage of ANCSA, BLM received 10,000 applications for Native allotments in addition to some 5,000 applications received earlier. Thousands of Native allotments are located within lands selected by the State and Native corporations. These allotment applications must be processed, surveyed and conveyed before surrounding land selections by the State and Native corporations can be finalized.

Recently a team of BLM employees, faced with conflicting land claims over state park land, tried a new approach that simplified the lengthy conveyance process and satisfied all parties involved.

During the 1980s, the State and several citizens filed affidavits disputing approximately 108 Native allotment applications that claimed land within the Wood-Tikchik State Park, located in southwest Alaska. The Native allotment applicants claimed they had use of the land prior to the State's selection. The affidavits disputing the allotment applications challenged the Native's exclusive use and occupancy of the land. The State contended the Native allotment applications were located in areas that were extremely sensitive and important for fisheries production and public use; citizens opposed the claims because the area is a popular guide area for sport fishing and hunting.

"What was different in this situation was the continued involvement with the state and Bristol Bay Native Association throughout the process."
—Sharon Warren, branch chief for conveyances

Typically, these conflicts require a lengthy and expensive hearing process. But in 1992 a federal law was passed allowing substitution of state lands if the State, the Native applicant or heirs, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs all agree. Based on that law, employees from BLM, the State Division of Parks and Lands, and the Bristol Bay Native Association met last year to resolve the complex land entitlement problems.

"What was different in this situation was the continued involvement with the State and Bristol Bay Native Association throughout the process," says Sharon Warren, a branch chief for BLM-Alaska's conveyance division and head of the team nominated for Employee of the Year award for their work.

"There were more meetings with outside groups and the people involved. We worked directly with the State Division of Lands, the State Division of Parks (since it involved a state park), and the Bristol Bay Native Association. It's kind of common sense—you get all the players together and you work off the same sheet of music. Bringing everyone with a common interest together—that's what worked. Everybody was willing to come to the table and work together for a common solution."

The State Division of Parks developed options which balanced the allottees' opportunity to develop lands in the park while providing for the park's natural resources. Cases were adjudicated so the surveys could begin as scheduled in 1997. Negotiations and adjudication were completed, and special survey instructions were written.

As a result, the park will have fewer inholdings and some control for development within the park boundary; Native allottees will receive their land, and continue customary and traditional uses; and the surveys and eventual land transfers will take place on schedule.

"We see more happening with folks negotiating. BLM employees are meeting more with outside clients to get things done," says Warren. "Even the internal process has improved; there's more awareness to get things squared away."

—Janet Malone

City of Wrangell hopes survey sparks mineral exploration in Southeast Alaska

The City of Wrangell, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Alaska State Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys (DGGS) have just completed a detailed airborne geophysical survey of a 1,180-square-mile area in Southeast Alaska. BLM is responsible for conducting mineral assessments of federal lands in Alaska, and is currently conducting a multi-year study of the mineral resources of the Stikine area.

Concentrated in areas near Wrangell, the survey was designed to locate large economically viable mineral deposits. The main target of interest is large massive sulfide deposits that contain lead, zinc and silver. The City of Wrangell hopes the survey will stimulate mineral exploration in central Southeast Alaska.

The rugged mountains east of Wrangell proved challenging for the helicopter pilot and survey crew. Beginning in March, the data collection took two months to complete. Instruments hanging in a torpedo-shaped pod 90 feet below the helicopter are used to detect variations in the earth's magnetic field and in the electrical properties of the rocks. Data is collected as the helicopter flies back and forth along lines placed precisely one-quarter of a mile apart. Keeping the instruments 200 feet above the ground, the helicopter must fly up and down along the contour of the ground.

The DGGS volunteered to oversee the contract and release the data since they have been conducting geophysical surveys of state lands for several years. With the state managing the contract, data quality and products will be similar with surveys for the whole state.

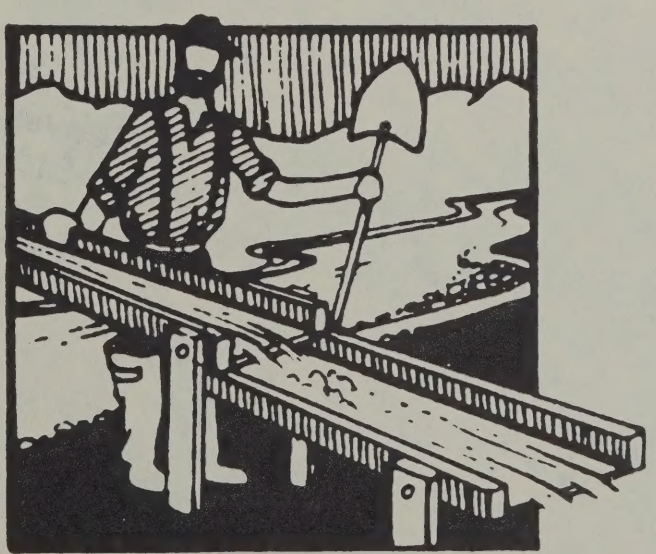
An additional agency, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), provided advice and support during the area selection process, and is currently developing geologic maps that will assist in interpretation of the geophysical data. The maps and data eventually will be available from the BLM's Juneau Mineral Information Center.

—Roger Baer

Deadline approaches for filing fee

Mining claimants on federal lands are reminded that the deadline to pay the $100 maintenance fee to file a waiver for the upcoming assessment year is August 31.

For information or assistance with filing requirements, contact the nearest office of the Bureau of Land Management.



frontier flashes

Wildland fire fighting officials from seven countries, including Russia and South Africa, toured the Alaska Fire Service in June to look at fire and resource management techniques. Prior to visiting Alaska the group toured the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, and the BLM state office in New Mexico.

The Alaska tour included an overview of BLM-Alaska's unique agreement with the State of Alaska to share wildland fire fighting responsibilities.

The group also looked at urban interface fire areas, toured a prescribed burn, and met with state officials to discuss the 1996 Miller's Reach wildfire north of Anchorage.

Members of the international delegation will integrate this information into fire fighting management practices for their respective countries.

As of mid-August, the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center reports 681 fires statewide have burned a total of 1,873,000 acres.

There's going to be a new resource library in Anchorage.

After two years of planning, seven state and federal agencies will join with the University of Alaska Anchorage and the Oil Spill Public Information Center to form the Alaska Resources Library and Information Center (ARLIS).

The new facility will combine collections now found scattered in nine separate locations throughout Anchorage. ARLIS will offer a full range of library services and have one of the largest collections about the state's natural resources.

The library will open and be fully operational approximately October 16th of this year.

The resource library is located at:

3150 C Street
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Or phone: (907) 271-ARLIS

The Campbell Creek Science Center (CCSC), located in BLM's Anchorage District, competed with 96 other contenders for a grant under the BLM's Field Incentive Awards Program.

The center was awarded $12,000 through the program which helps fund outstanding resource projects that use partnerships and directly benefit the environment. The CCSC provides quality outdoor learning experiences for children, and serves as a regional resource for environmental education.

Center Director Deborah Greene says the additional funding will be used to develop volunteer-based biological inventories of the Campbell Tract's plant and animal species. The data will be used by area teachers; the public; and staff, interns and volunteers of the CCSC.

The program, which began three years ago, has provided $500,000 in direct funding to projects like the center.

Editor: Janet S. Malone

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